# *Yukon Medical Doctor Exit Survey*

# *2003*

Yukon
Executive Council Office
**Bureau of Statistics**

# Yukon Medical Doctor Exit Survey

## December 2003

In December of 2003, a survey was conducted of the 17 medical doctors who had left the Yukon since 1999. The survey asked the physicians six questions with the intent to determine what can be done in the future to attract and keep physicians in the Territory. The doctors were given the option of mailing in their response, completing the survey over the telephone or requesting an electronic version of the survey. All 17 doctors completed the survey and the following is a summary of their responses. Five of these physicians received a medical degree from a Canadian university, while the other 12 had received their degree from a foreign university.

### 1. What type of practice did you have in the Yukon?

| Type of Practice | number reporting | % |
|---|---|---|
| Rural Community | 10 | 59% |
| Whitehorse | 10 | 59% |
| Office Practice | 16 | 94% |
| Walk-in Clinic | 3 | 18% |
| Locum | 3 | 18% |
| Hospital | 10 | 59% |
| Emergency Room | 9 | 53% |
| Medevacs | 6 | 35% |
| Contract for additional services | 3 | 18% |

The most common type of practice, 16 of the 17 doctors, had an office practice. Ten doctors reported practicing in Whitehorse, while 10 also reported practicing in the rural communities. Also, 10 doctors had hospital admitting privileges and nine had emergency room privileges.

Note: For this question, respondents were requested to report all that applied so the aggregate type of practice reported will be greater than the number of respondents.

### 2. What were some of the reasons behind your decision to come to the Yukon?

| Reasons | Number reporting | % |
|---|---|---|
| Had visited Yukon previously | 1 | 6% |
| Earning potential/income | 1 | 6% |
| Yukon was the first choice to practice | 4 | 24% |
| Yukon licensing requirements | 7 | 41% |
| Other reasons | 14 | 82% |

Note: For this question, respondents were requested to report all that applied so the aggregate type of practice reported will be greater than the number of respondents.

## 2. What were some of the reasons behind your decision to come to the Yukon? cont....

**Other reasons** included:

- I needed to make a change . . . also always had wanted to experience "Canada's True North".
- I was looking for work and was offered a position in the Yukon so I accepted it.
- Always dreamt of seeing Canada's North.
- Good place for foreign graduates to get their licensing requirements.
- I had a friend in the Yukon and I wanted to live in the Bush. The Yukon seemed like a good place to live.
- The Yukon was a good place to practice and get medical experience. I was only allowed to work in a clinic. I tried several times to get hospital privileges but was always denied.
- I was a foreigner and needed to get experience practicing in a small community.
- I applied everywhere in Canada and the Yukon was the first place to offer me a job so I accepted the position.
- To experience something new and to get some experience.
- I wanted to practice in the North for the experience.
- I wanted to live in the North
- I am a foreign doctor and needed experience any where in Canada so that I could work in southern provinces. The Yukon was the first place that accepted my application for work so that I could get the experience that I needed.
- I came to the Yukon because I loved the wilderness.
- I wanted to go to an isolated Northern Community with little specialist back-up. I had applied to the Yukon and N.W.T. and the first reply was [from a Yukon clinic] so I came up for a locum, loved it and stayed.

## 3. What were some of the reasons for leaving the Yukon?

| Reasons | Number reporting | % |
|---|---|---|
| Left to pursue further education | 0 | 0% |
| Low earning potential/income | 3 | 18% |
| Low patient volume | 1 | 6% |
| Problem obtaining hospital priveleges | 1 | 6% |
| Completed CCFP certification | 0 | 0% |
| Other reasons | 16 | 94% |

Note: For this question, respondents were requested to report all that applied so the aggregate type of practice reported will be greater than the number of respondents.

**Other reasons** included:

- System is only good for Canadian Medical Graduates. ER/Hospital privileges are not given to foreign graduates. They do not recognize our training.
- It is very isolated living in the Yukon. My spouse was unable to get a job in the Yukon.
- Leaving the Yukon was difficult and ultimately there were more reasons to leave than to stay.
  - Illness/aging of parent(s)
  - Community initially was very caring, supportive and happy and it was a pleasure to practice. [Then] a lot of tension developed between specialists and non- specialists . . no longer a happy community.
  - professionally confining--on the one hand a great opportunity to get involved and be someone and participate even nationally on committees etc. and yet there is a much bigger world out there
  - proximity to grandparents for children.
- Very sensitive and personal reasons. I can not specify.
- My family lives in [another location]. It is too far away from the Yukon. It takes a long time to fly home.

### 3. What were some of the reasons for leaving the Yukon? continued...

**Other reasons** (continued):

- Retiring
- There were no job opportunities for my spouse and the educational system was not good for my children.
- Increasing office expenses. YMA - did not support me financially to open my solo practice. No financial support for opening practice by doctors already residing in Yukon. You have to join one of the existing 5 clinics which have very high expenses.
- Wanted full time work so after I got my experience accepted a full time job elsewhere
- The Yukon is "out of touch" in what is happening in the rest of Canada. Rates for service are much higher elsewhere in Canada. I worked 240 hours a month and that paid for my rent. I wanted to be paid for being on call. I didn't want to volunteer any more free hours of work. I feel a doctor should be paid when they work.
- I had aging family in the south so I want to live closer to them.
- Too isolated, too cold.
- I was alone, I left so that I could be with family.
- Family illness and wanted to live closer to extended family
- The workload was extremely heavy . . . Because my workload was so heavy, my marriage and child suffered.
- I worked in the Yukon for 2 years and I was not allowed hospital/ER privileges. I was only allowed to work in a clinic. You don't make much money working in a clinic as the overhead is so high. You make money working in the hospital and I was denied that privilege.
- I was living away from my wife and children. I needed to be with my family so I left the Yukon. I did enjoy living and working in the Yukon.

### 4. What was the biggest benefit to working in the Yukon?

| Reasons | Number reporting | % |
|---|---|---|
| Outdoor pursuits | 7 | 41% |
| Earning potential/income | 5 | 29% |
| Lifestyle choices | 8 | 47% |
| Living in the community | 6 | 35% |
| Other benefits | 12 | 71% |

Note: For this question, respondents were requested to report all that applied so the aggregate type of practice reported will be greater than the number of respondents.

**Other benefits** included:

- Beautiful place
- Getting medical practice experience. The school system is good.
- I loved it and encourage everyone to visit or go and work there. As a GP one can truly practice (and it is required) as a full practice GP. As a young physician you can do all sorts of things that down south you would have to wait for many years to get an opportunity to do.
- In addition to the professional benefits, the wilderness and sports opportunities are great. Likewise I enjoyed the unique history of the place. -
- I love to practice medicine in the Yukon. I like the community and the people.
- The nature and beauty of the north. I loved living in the communities and working with First Nation people.
- I liked working with First Nations people.
- It was good experience working in the Yukon. The atmosphere and people were good.
- Security, Aquatic Center (swimming pool), natural beauty of the Yukon Territory.
- I am from (outside Canada) so getting into practice in Canada was very good for me.
- "Rush minute", i.e. no congestion or crowds of people - lots of space. Friendly people. Excellent medical plan... much better than [another location].
- The experience you get working in a small community is varied, so much more than you would get in a larger center. The wilderness - I loved it.
- The Yukon is a good, nice place to live.

For the next two questions, the responses were separated into two categories, those of physicians who had left prior to April 1, 2002 and those who left the Yukon after that date. On April 1, 2002 the Yukon Government and the Yukon Medical Association entered an agreement which established physician on-call and recruitment and retention programs.

### 5. What was the biggest drawback?

| Reasons | Number reporting | % |
|---|---|---|
| Distance from family | 11 | 65% |
| Climate | 3 | 18% |
| Lack of medical school | 0 | 0% |
| Size of community | 2 | 12% |
| Other drawbacks - ones gov't can influence | 13 | 76% |

Note: For this question, respondents were requested to report all that applied so the aggregate type of practice reported will be greater than the number of respondents.

### Other drawbacks - ones government can influence

Respondent left after April 1, 2002

- Hard/unable to get hospital privileges.
- Clients dictate what they want. "If you don't give me this, I'll go to another doctor." There is a need to survive so you sometimes give in. I want to practice medicine not raise money for the clinic owners and be told by the client what I could do.
- Fee for Service is not good for the foreign doctor but is for the clinic owners. Doctors should receive a salary instead of "fee for service". The overhead for renting space in a clinic is 40 %.
- Foreign doctors make 4 times more in NWT and don't have problems getting hospital privileges.
- My spouse was unable to find employment in the Yukon. (2)
- The education system is poor.(2)
- Distance from "the rest of the world" - isolation (2)
- I left because I was unable to get hospital privileges. If my patients are in the hospital, I should be able to tend to them.
- New doctors are not made to feel welcome in the Yukon.

Respondent left before April 1, 2002

- The medical community makes life difficult for new doctors.
- Many locums feel that the doctors really rip-off the locums financially with the 60-40 split and applying that to emergency work and hospital work. Down south they get to keep 90% of out of clinic earnings, that is why some feel bitter and leave.
- Another big problem now is that fewer doctors want to go into general practice and the CCFP training is just not the same to enable young doctors to work independently in isolated communities; therefore there are less and less potential candidates to go north in the first place.
- Income was lower working in the Yukon. The value of being on call was not recognized. I was on call for thousands of hours and you are only paid if you are actually called in.
- Income is not attractive. New doctors are coming out of University with huge debts. They can't pay off their debts and live on the wages that a Yukon doctor makes. The NWT and the rest of Canada pay doctors a lot better than the Yukon does.
- The expenses of living in the north. It is very high compared to southern provinces.
- None.
- The heavy workload. In a small community you are working all the time. We did not get paid for being on call. We should have. I worked many hours for no pay. This is not right.

## 6. What, if anything, would bring you back to the Yukon to practice again?

Respondent left after April 1, 2002

- I love the community, lifestyle and the people. It is a small city but it is not very welcoming.
- Once I fulfill my family obligations and/or when my kids are grown up and no longer need me I may consider moving back. (3)
- If my spouse had been able to find work and if the educational system was good, we would have stayed.
- Change the attitude to new doctors.
- The older doctors who are controlling the hospital need to give new doctors hospital privileges. (3)
- For new doctors coming to the Yukon, there should be some kind of a contract offering them some incentives. If you do not have hospital privileges, you can only make $40,000 a year. A doctor would be crazy to stay in the Yukon and work for that wage when they can go elsewhere and get hospital privileges and make a lot more money.

Respondent left before April 1, 2002

- Better accessibility to specialists
- Nuclear destruction of "the rest of the world"
- The Yukon needs to recognize the value of a doctor being on call.
- It needs to be easier for a doctor to go outside to update their medical training. Rural doctors in the Yukon need more skills than a doctor in a larger center. Training should be encouraged. Wages in Whitehorse are worse than in the Rural Communities.
- It is good that the Yukon government has started paying airfare for doctors doing locum.
- Doctors in the communities need to be paid for being "on-call". The nurses have a better "on-call" deal than the doctors.
- The overhead in the clinics is extremely high. Perhaps the government could support overhead costs.
- It doesn't matter if you see a patient for 15 min. or 45 min., you still get the same fee. Some patients need things well explained and it takes longer. Some doctors rush the patients so that they can see more, thus making more money and sometimes doing a sloppy job. This is not good. The fee structure needs to be looked at.
- More income.



*Additional Information*:
Government of Yukon
Executive Council Office
Bureau of Statistics
Box 2703, Whitehorse, Yukon Y1A 2C6
Telephone: (867)667-5640; Fax: (867)393-6203
E-mail: ybsinfo@gov.yk.ca
Web site: www.gov.yk.ca/depts/eco/stats/